

# TOTAL FACT - TOTAL FACTITIOUS

A Thesis Submitted to the  
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts  
In the Department of Art and Art History  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

By

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# 1-Introduction

In writing this support paper, I have incorporated both theory and practice as they offer insight into the transition and thinking processes that I have developed during my Master's program. This essay begins with my research and artistic exploration during four semesters of study at the University of Saskatchewan, concluding with my final master's thesis exhibition. At the beginning of my studies in this program, I was intrigued by the concept of space. My work has been informed by many established artists, including Richard Serra, Antony Gormley, and Bruce Nauman, whose individual practices have an affinity with my artistic exploration. It is difficult to visualize the physical and psychological aspects of space. When considering space, our memories and experiences are just as important as the object that physically occupies the space. Since we spend most of our formative years at home, so many of our memories are tied to our conception of home, and, as our homes become more and more filled with memories, we are unable to see them the same way they were before. French philosopher Gaston Bachelard argues that a house is one of the most significant places of memory. He states that “a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated.”<sup>1</sup>

Having studied abroad and lived outside of my home country during my Master's of Fine Arts (MFA) program has given me valuable insights into my sense of home, memories, and the physical and psychological spaces I inhabit. I am keenly interested in exploring the meaning of the spaces I have occupied in the past and the spaces I occupy today. My Master's degree in Fine Arts has provided me with the opportunity to experiment, reflect, reconsider the way I use space in my art practice, and to question how the transition from a physical/psychological space may alter my work. How might I incorporate my memories into new work focusing on “space”? What is the threshold between established memories and factitious ones?

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<sup>1</sup> Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetic of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 8.

## 2-Artistic and Theoretical Practice

My MFA projects and research were initiated by a profound interest in installation art and the exploration of the meaning of space, whether public or private. During the past two years, I focused on installation art and its history. According to Claire Bishop, "...the distinction between an installation of works of art and 'installation art' proper has become increasingly blurred. My focus has been to create work which may heighten the viewer's awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space and of our bodily response to this."<sup>2</sup> Since reading Bishop's statement, I became especially interested in the concept of space and audience's reaction to space and objects therein. I was interested in learning more about the interactions between objects and the environment. Specifically, I tried to assess how the surrounding environment of objects can alter their physical characteristics as well as how objects in the environment can change our perception of those environments. In my research, I explored several relationships between objects and locations, as well as artists who were interested in objects and space, including Richard Serra, Richard Wilson, and Antony Gormley. I found Serra's explorations of object-space integration and how site-specificity functions in sculptures to be striking and inspirational. Serra explains "Site-specific works deal with the environmental components of a given place. The scale, size, and location of site-specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether it be urban or landscape or architectural enclosure. The works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually the organization of the site. A new behavioral and perceptual orientation to a site demands a new critical adjustment to one's experience of the place."<sup>3</sup> The Serra's practice and the way he used materials and objects to reorganize space inspired me to do my first installation project in the Archeology Building at the University of Saskatchewan. The project was entitled "Growing Discomfort" (Picture 1).

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<sup>2</sup> Claire Bishop. *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Serra, *Richard Serra: Writings, Interviews* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), 202-203.



Picture1. *Growing Discomfort*, painted Wood, Archeology building  
(University of Saskatchewan), Saskatoon, 2019

In this installation, I placed wooden sticks in the stairway to obstruct the normal walking pattern. Changing the more instinctual direction of participants to the less travelled section of the staircase, this series of growing tapes confines the space while forcing a person to merge to one side of a narrowing path. This intervention challenges participants' perceptions of the staircase, which is usually so solid, historic, and elegant. These added horizontal beams not only disrupt the path of the viewer but suggests to a change in their familiar space, such as structural problem, or renovation. With this project, I intentionally tried to break viewers' familiarity with physical and built space by placing them in a vulnerable position.

In the same location, I developed a second version of the stairway project that involved building a burnt wooden platform directly on the stairs to further cause disorientation when walking on them. As a way of engaging the audience, I incorporated multi-sensory elements such as a cracking noise when the platform was stepped on, and a burning wood smell to trigger an emotion, reaction, or a meaningful memory. In this work, viewers/participants are confronted by an annoyance, a space being disrupted, possibly by an “event” and a feeling of uncertainty and instability (Picture 2).



These two site-specific works were exhibited in my first semester. My intent was to consider how people might interact with my alterations as they experience my constructed spaces physically. Throughout these works, I wanted not only to redefine the traditional conception of sculpture as an object that can be viewed and observed but also to create works whose meaning would be connected with their location and interaction with it. Participating in my installations is an integral part of the built environments I create. Immersion is essential to fully understand the intentions behind my work.

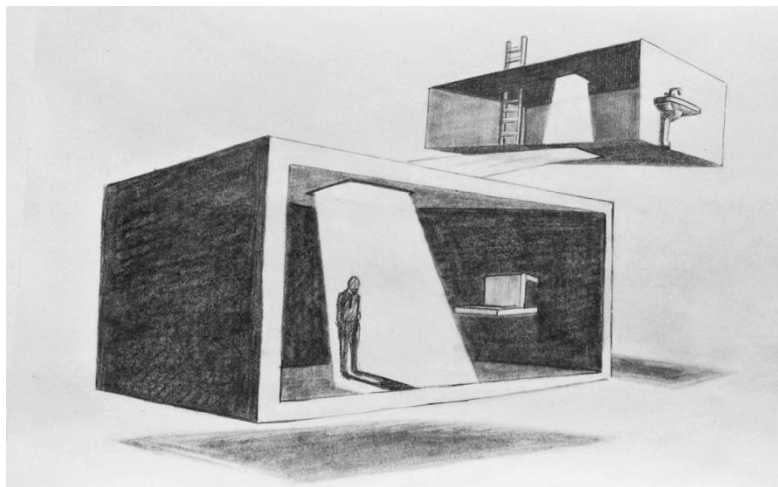


Picture2. *Burnt Stairs*, Wooden Platforms, Archeology building  
(University of Saskatchewan), Saskatoon, 2019

Because of Covid-19 lockdowns and limited access to the campus studios and workshops in the second semester, I began working on an ongoing series of fully digitally rendered images of architectural spaces with 3D modeling software in lieu of physical sculptural work and spaces.

For this series of works, I started with a simple cubic virtual space. Cubes are the most elementary and common form of 3-dimensional architecture. Buildings or rooms are typically composed of many cubic spaces connected by horizontal and vertical surfaces and lines. I then created an illusionary room that was a void, a blank canvas that I could fully imaginatively manipulate to create factitious spaces.

During Tim Nowlin's senior drawing class, I came up with the concept of cubic space, and I began by creating frameless spaces and then added domestic objects to the inside (Picture 3). For me, an empty space is synonymous with waiting for things to be added, a space whose identity is based on how it is altered by an occupant. Depending on how audiences perceive them, spaces can be infinite or confined, literal or metaphorical. The meaning of space, particularly those that are familiar and intimate to us, such as the home, can be subtly explained in *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard. According to him, the aesthetic experience and the role of imagination in art and literature have a close relationship to human lives. He states, "... the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another."<sup>4</sup>



Picture3. *Rooms*, pencil on paper, Saskatoon, 2020

The place where we were born and have lived leaves a lasting impression on us. Rooms and the objects within them hold a story that triggers a memory, emotions, and attachments with its inhabitants. Bachelard states: "A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining

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<sup>4</sup> Bachelard. *The Poetic of Space*, 6.

its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house; it would mean developing a veritable psychology of the house.”<sup>5</sup> Memory of a space, however, may fade or become uncertain over time, and we may lose some of them or integrate false images of the space into our minds, in that case “the house of memories becomes psychologically complex”<sup>6</sup> as Bachelard states.

I have become increasingly fascinated with the complexity and ambiguity of space over time, and have broadened my research through my building of virtual models of domestic environments. Each of the interiors I illustrate is set up theatrically and has a story, though the story is not entirely true. The main source of inspiration behind these digital works came from theoretical perspectives that consider the relationship between the body and mind to surrounding space; that is, the ways we define our perception of space. These digitally produced spaces are the result of a passion and need to reconfigure my environment from the past to the present. Being an artist who lived for many years in the shadow of political and social turmoil, I have constantly sought to achieve a way through my artistic practice to restructure those memories. Through digital media, I have the ability to remove images of places remembered, implementing a new story, an illusionary substitute and transforming my memories. My actual memories at this point are hazy because they have been clouded over by time, possibly as a coping mechanism, and a desire to create new alternative experiences. These digitally constructed interior spaces explore the alienated sense of detachment and displacement both from a geographical sense of place and from the perspective of my own body.

To add visual texture to these manipulated spaces, I used Blender, a 3D modeling program. Two different digital versions were created, the first consisting of four images of strange rooms with unusual spatial constructions that created an illusion of deep psychological spaces. These domestic spaces are not entirely empty; they are furnished with a bed, chair, or table, just like any other room. The presence of objects was, indeed, an essential component to making this entire series of works meaningful.

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<sup>5</sup> Bachelard. *The Poetic of Space*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Space is interpreted by the objects that occupy them and, each object contains characteristics that references and activates memories of places and spaces. The interrelationship that exists between object, memory, and space is a central theme in Henri Bergson's theory of memory and time, which is eloquently outlined in his book, *Matter and Memory*. In Bergson's view, spaces evoke memories based on the objects and matter that occupies them. His definition of space is related to memory, and it is directly dependent upon how humans encounter matter and object.

Furthermore, Bergson describes how memory works. According to him, memories have occurred in time, and that they are accessible by us at any moment, but they are also filtered by the matter surrounding our bodies at the time, so we cannot fully recall and immediately access them. Curt Cloninger has outlined four implications of Bergson's philosophy of time. In one of his interpretations, he gives Bergson's perspective on the idea of "real." He states:

"Bergson's real divides into two realms "the virtual" and "the actual." None of this has anything to do with Virtual Reality (data gloves, headsets, avatars, 3D environments). Bergson's actual real describes all of the forces that have come together in the confluence of historical time to form what we know as history. The actual is that aspect of the real that has been historically actualized. The actual has come to pass historically, and we know it now as the past. The actual can only ever be actualized in the present, and then it immediately passes into history it becomes that which has happened. The virtual real is comprised of all those forces surrounding the present, awaiting actualization in the confluence of historical time. The virtual is comprised of those forces which have not yet coalesced in time. These forces may coalesce in time in a billion different possible combinations, and/or they may never coalesce in time at all. The virtual is still real, because it is contingent on actual history thus far. The virtual is not comprised of every single force that may ever exist at all times. It is not an abstract, imaginary, or hypothetical realm. In short, the virtual is not unreal."<sup>7</sup>

Bergson's idea of how the actual, virtual, and "real" co-exists, and how memory relates to objects in space has influenced my most current series of work. Through this series of digitized environments, I intend to recall memories of significant places,

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<sup>7</sup> Curt Cloninger "Henri Bergson's understanding of time, memory, matter, and the mind," 2011, [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/chicago\\_manual\\_17th\\_edition/cmos\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/web\\_sources.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmos_formatting_and_style_guide/web_sources.html).

objects, and situations that have occurred to me in the "virtual real." This series of work become visualizations, spaces where the boundary between the virtual and actual is vague. Throughout my work, I attempt to break binary structures, such as actual and virtual, presence and absence, and realistic and fantastical. The places I illustrate connect the past and present. In terms of its general theme, it refers to homes and to residential spaces from both a personal and universal viewpoint. Room Series (Bedroom) shows an empty room with cracked and collapsed wall tiles (picture 4). This room is set up in a way that seems to evoke the memory of an uncomfortable moment, claustrophobic and disruptive potentially crumbling and falling apart. There is evidence of habitation, a bodily presence in these spaces, even without a person. Whether a bed, chair, or table. Whether they are covered or obscured, the narrative behind each space remains mysterious and uncertain. They represent a kind of fiction and memory that is incorrect or has somehow been fabricated.



Picture4. *Room Series (Bedroom)*, Digital Render, October 2020

In this series of images, ephemerality is a key feature of the illustrated spaces. The space in each image is a fragment of time captured from a transitory memory and transformed metaphorically. The juxtaposition of time and memory is a key focus in the works of Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky. His book, *Sculpting in Time*, is about art and cinema and focused on his own films, where he declares that time and memory is interconnected. He states: "Time and memory merge into each other; they are like the

two sides of a medal. It is obvious enough that without Time, memory cannot exist either. But memory is something so complex that no list of all its attributes could define the totality of the impressions through which it affects us.”<sup>8</sup>

Room Series (Sitting in the fog) features an armchair in a foggy atmospheric room. Fog or mist permeates the space, diffuses a corner, and causes the floor to disappear into the wall and making the space ephemeral and ambiguous. (Picture 5).



Picture5. Room Series (Sitting in the fog), Digital render, October 2020

The second series of images includes three images which depict more institutional settings, similar to hallways and public corridors, which lead into a void. This series of interior spaces is characterized by its surreal, ambiguous, and dreary environments, oddly manipulated. In creating this series, I was influenced by Bruce Nauman's corridor piece. Nauman's *Performance Corridor* comprises a simple structure made up of parallel strips of wallboard supported by a crude wooden post. It is a work that requires direct participation from the beholder in order to be completed. It is extremely narrow, which has a noticeable effect on passersby. To truly experience this sculpture, the viewer must physically enter its tight space, awkwardly engaging in the work as a performer, and taking the place of the artist himself as the main perpetrator of the work.

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<sup>8</sup> Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time* (Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1986), 57.

The *Extended Table* pays tribute to Nauman's corridor using virtual media. The digital image depicts an oak chair at the end of a long table, which disappears into the void of a narrow hallway. In this piece, unlike Nauman's work, the viewer visually traverses through the empty space between walls engaging in a simulated environment, where comprehension of the space can only be achieved through one's personal imagination and suspension of belief, and referring back to something familiar and foreign; surreal and fictional. The embedded chair serves as an inviting element in this work, encouraging viewers to engross in the long mysterious gloomy hallway, a kind of abyss at the end of the table. I attempted to deliberately and virtually configure the space in order to control how viewers would interact and engage with it, like Nauman's approach in his corridor pieces. As Julie Reiss wrote of Nauman's *Performance Corridor* piece: "This work, like his other corridor pieces, was participatory in an individual, behaviorist way that engaged the spectator in a role controlled by the absent artist, who nonetheless was present, in a sense, through the control he exerted."<sup>9</sup>



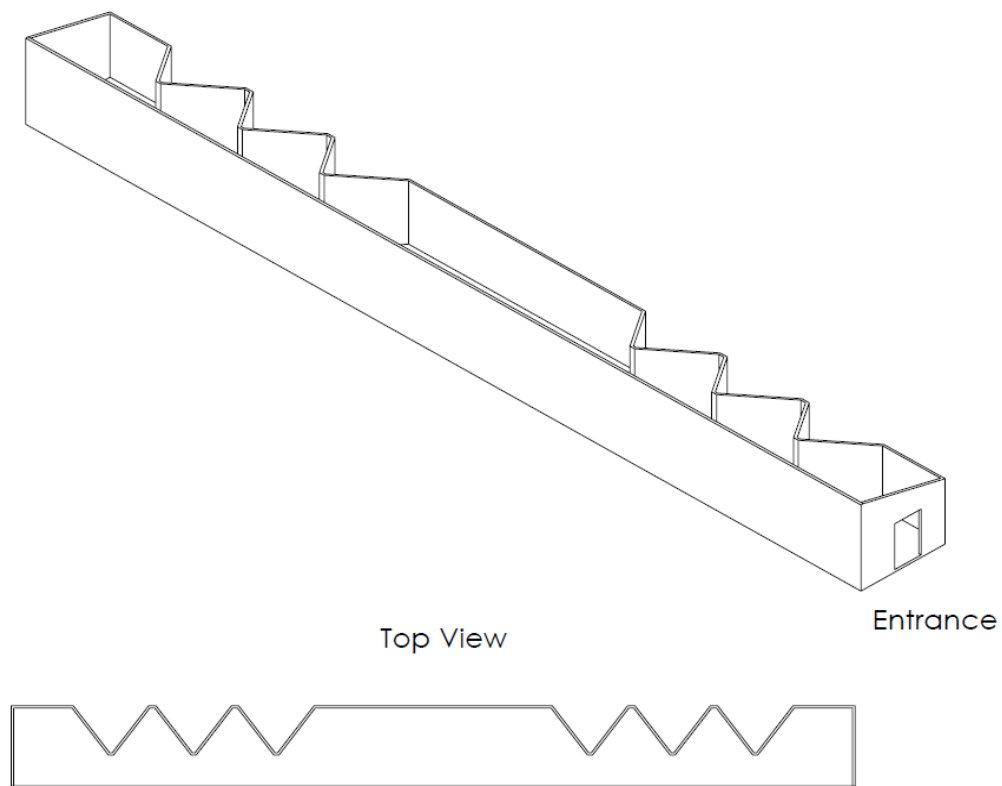
Picture6. *Corridor Series (Extended table)*, Digital render, November 2020

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<sup>7</sup> Julie Reiss, *From Margin to Center: the Spaces of Installation Art* (Massachusetts: The MIT press, 1999), 84.

### 3- Thesis Exhibition

Having carefully examined several gallery spaces and considering a variety of factors, I ultimately decided to organize my thesis exhibition in a less conventional setting. I decided to exhibit my work in a space with zig-zag walls that are divided into smaller units. This long hallway has an institutional quality in addition to its odd architecture, which somewhat relates to the idea behind some of my digital works. The gallery space measures 114 by 12 feet and is configured with three units per side (Picture8).



Picture7. Exhibition layout

With its zig-zag layout and multiple semi-room units, it can display a variety of works within each section, and even a sculpture across multiple sections. The unique architectural setting may make a sculpture partially visible from a distance, but one must walk down the hall to see the rest of it. I found this possibility intriguing and relevant to my



exhibition's central theme of creating some level of uncertainty. The zig-zag walls can also be utilized to bring about some sort of dualism, exhibiting a sense of real versus fiction and past versus present by crossing a sculpture between the walls and dividing it into two separate parts to create a sense of ambiguity and illusion. I became interested in this idea after exploring Roni Horn's uses of doubling and pairing. Horn's doubling series attempts to embody proximity and how the presence of two may change the identity of one. In *Things That Happen Again, Pair Object VII (For a Here and a There)*, Horn used two identical truncated solid copper cones in a long room to prompt an unsettling feeling as the viewer cannot check the difference and similarities of two objects at the same time. Viewer experience of Horn's works is dependent upon time (now and then) and space (here and there). Horn states, "In recognizing what is there, the experience itself does not reside in that realm. The distinction between the physical realities of looking at the object versus what it is when you walk away from it is a key part of that experience."<sup>10</sup>

With these possibilities in mind, I decided to setup the exhibition in a way that functions as an integrated set of elements and spaces rather than as individual works. I wanted to consider the gallery space not just as a display area, but as a volume for contextualizing my works. Though each element in my show functions as a single piece, they are grouped thematically and harmoniously integrated into their space.

Only by fully engaging with the space and objects within the exhibition can an individual fully comprehend it. As the viewer makes his way through the hallway, he will notice a rusted metal bed frame placed in a corner, with a mattress, pillow, and sheet clustered in the middle of the frame. In the center of the hallway, there is a boarded-up doorway that is located near a spilled glass of water on the floor that was likely caused by recklessly opening the door. Toward the end of this long corridor, two additional pieces are visible behind the zig-zag walls. One work shows a pile of sand beneath a vintage kitchen sink, and the other portrays two pedestal fans facing each other while turning pages of a book.

While thinking of how to set up my thesis exhibition, I could not stop thinking of Ilya Kabakov's term 'total installation.' According to Bishop, the term describes an

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<sup>10</sup> Louise Neri, *Roni Horn: to Fold* (London: Phaidon press, 2000), 35.

installation that offers viewers both a physical immersion and an absorptive psychological experience. In his installations, the beholder plays an essential role in how the work is perceived physically and psychologically. According to Kabakov: "The main actor in the total installation, the main center toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer... the whole installation is oriented only toward his perception, and any point of the installation, any of its structures is oriented only toward the impression it should make on the viewer, only his reaction is anticipated."<sup>11</sup>

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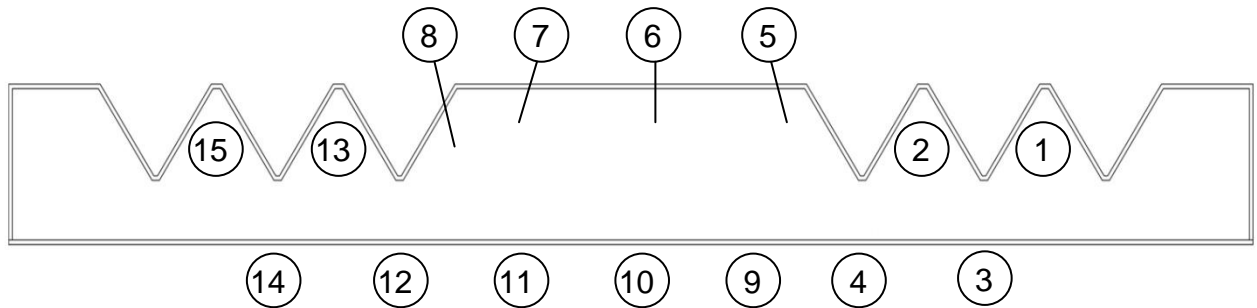
<sup>11</sup> Bishop. *Installation Art: A Critical History*, 14.

## 4-Conclusion

Total Fact - Total Factitious asks us to consider the possibilities of memories to recall spaces shaping the past and present. This exhibition explores the relationship between place (space), object, and individuals' memories associated with them. In the Total Fact-Total Factitious, space is not only a place for objects to be located; it is also an element that cultivates memories. Throughout my exhibition, I incorporated works related to conceptualized space- the space of memory, architecture, and the real three-dimensional space in which we inhabit. Exploring the overlap between true and false memories is an important theme in my work, and the current exhibition and conducted studies sought to achieve this through turning real/factual objects and spaces into fabricated/artificial ones and vice versa.

## 5- Appendix

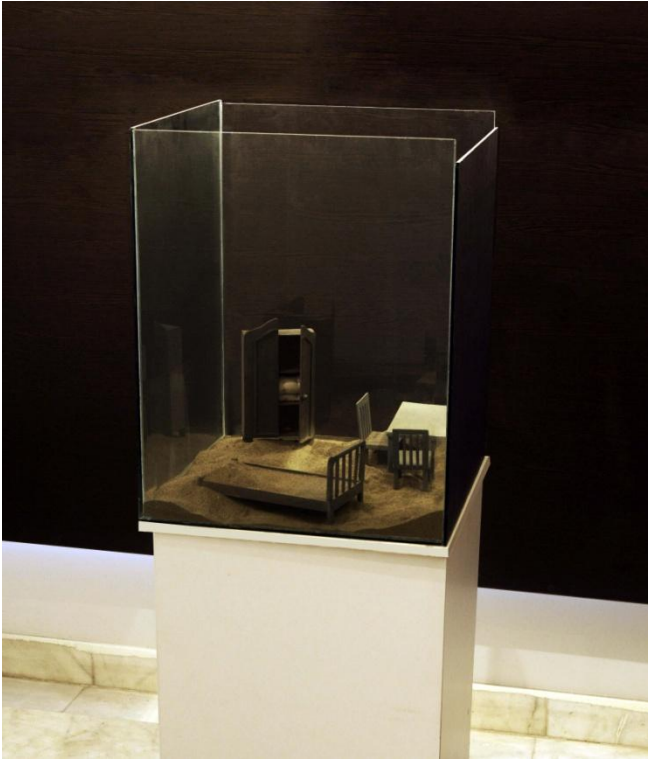
Total fact/Total factitious exhibition works and their location in the gallery space.



### 1. Rough sketches



2. A miniature room, 16. 16. 16 Inches, Glass sheets, Balsa wood, Sand, 2021



3. Corridor series, (Extended table), 28. 40 Inches, Digital Render print, 2020



4. Room series (Bed and Stair), 28. 40 Inches, Digital Render print, 2020



5. Disturbing dream, 80. 45. 50 Inches, Metal structure, 2021



6. Portable house, 60. 40. 40 Inches, Metal pipe, Wood, 2021





7. Door to the past, 78. 22. 4 Inches, Wood, 2021





8. Sunken sink, 25. 25. 15 Inches, Metal sink, Sand, 2021



9. Room series, (Sitting in the fog), 20. 28 Inches, Digital Render print, 2020



10. Suspended, 50. 50 Inches, Metal grid, 2020



11. Corridor series (Morgue), 20. 28 Inches, Digital Render print, 2020



12. Room series (Bedroom), 28. 40 Inches, Digital Render print, 2020

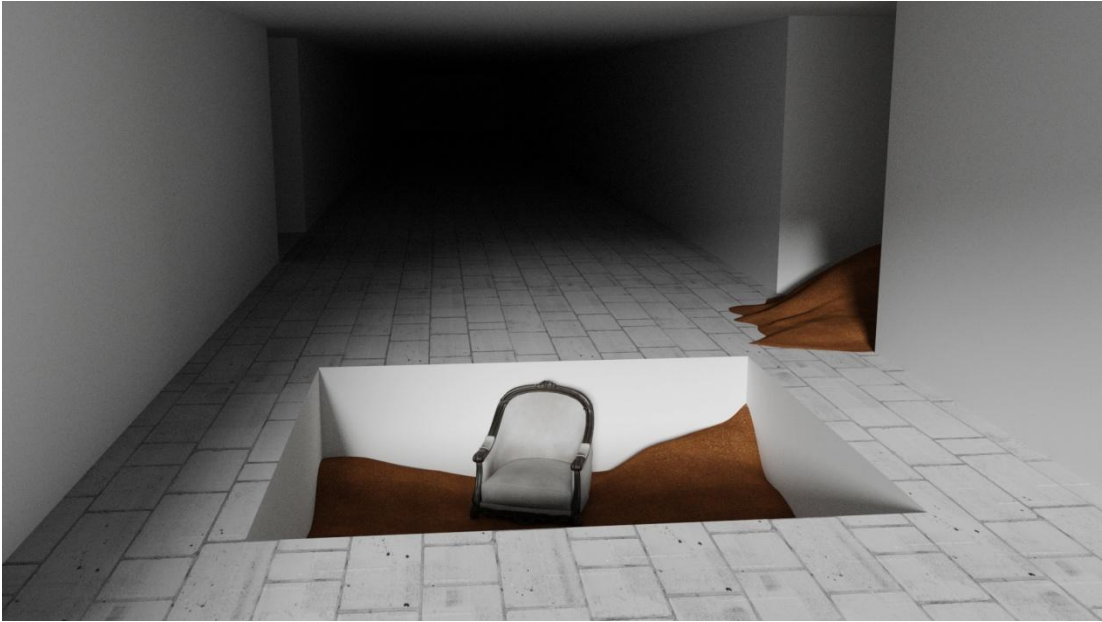


13. Two fans and one book, 60. 40. 20 Inches, Pedestal fan, Book, 2021





14. Corridor series (Armchair), 28. 40 Inches, Digital Render print, 2020



15. Recovering repressed Memories, 60. 40. 20 Inches, Chair, Plaster, Television, 2021



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